

Let's Not Be Cynical

By Mike Trippitt

Mike Trippitt is a freelance writer living in St Ives. His blog is at www.miketrippitt.com and you can follow him on Facebook.

"A cynic," wrote Oscar Wilde, *"is a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing."*

Arguably, this extraordinary year has tested prices and values more than any since World War II. The price of goods in demand has risen, the price of services unused has crashed. We have valued our health, our health service, our family, our freedom, and have challenged the values of those who put others at risk.

But whatever our values, let's be honest, we all love a bargain. Even perhaps, when the sweet smell of a good deal will later be consumed by the odour of a bad product. Advertising copywriters are all too aware of our insatiable appetite for low prices: "Every Little Helps", "Buy One Get One Free", "Two For The Price Of One", "Never Knowingly Undersold".

During lockdown the nation's retail and hospitality sectors have suffered terribly. Here, local independent shops', cafes', bars' and restaurants' income stopped overnight. For weeks they remained closed, whilst we found other ways to entertain ourselves and to obtain the food, drink and goods that we need. The ubiquitous delivery vans rumbled around our streets like never before.

Coronavirus did not create online shopping. Nor did it invent price wars or home entertainment. But the pandemic and lockdown has made us all the more ready to part with our money to the likes of Tesco, Amazon and Netflix. Many large retailers, sometimes owned by the richest amongst us, have seen income rise as the nation changed its habits.

But when in July our town centre shops, pubs and restaurants made their first tentative steps into the new world their problems were not over. Social distancing rules, our own anxieties and the temptation of a night at home with boxsets and biscuits still combine to keep some businesses teetering on the edge of disaster.

The government recognised the problem and dipped once more into its seemingly endless pot of cash, to create the Eat Out Help Out incentive. Up to £10 off a meal for 3 nights a week in August was a

well-meaning, and welcomed, attempt to kickstart the hospitality trade and cajole us back to high street venues.

Yet it will take more than a tenner here and there. The future of our little shops in St Ives, and of our owner-run cafes, pubs and restaurants is in our hands. They need us now more than ever. Yes, a chain restaurant on a retail park may be cheaper than the independent in town. The price of a pint in a chain pub might be a bit less than down at the local, and the online price of a television from abroad could well be less than that from a local electrical supplier. But would it really hurt us in the long run if we thought not of the price that we are paying for our goods, services and experiences, but of the price others are paying as a result of our choices.

The coming months and years will shape our high street. We need to support our local retailers, publicans and restaurateurs if we are to keep them. Many St Ivesians will value our local economy more highly than the price of a particular deal. It will be a cynic who does not.



ST. IVES CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

COULD YOU SPONSOR A LIGHT?

E mail us to find out more
stives.christmaslights@gmail.com

Or drop us a message on our FACEBOOK page

St Ives Christmas Lights